

Community Leaders Come Together to Advise on Next Steps for CMA CAO

(Columbus) Mayor Michael B. Coleman, County Commission President Mary Jo Kilroy and Magi York this week began meeting with the newly appointed Community Task Force to discuss the future of CMA CAO. York represents MICA, the Mid-Iowa Community Action agency, brought to Columbus to audit and manage day-to-day operations at CMA CAO. The troubled local social service agency is facing a short period of time in which to fix serious financial deficits of \$5.1 million or be disbanded, forcing new teams to deliver crucial local social services to families, seniors and children.

“We are united in our commitment to the services that CMA CAO provides, and we need to lay a clear course of action to either create a new Community Action Organization or completely overhaul the existing structure of CMA CAO,” said Commissioner Kilroy.

After more than a year of unsuccessful efforts by the City and Board members to get accurate fiscal information from CMA CAO’s Board Chair and others, the Ohio Department of Development brought MICA into Columbus to study the growing deficits and manage the organization. Mayor Coleman, Commissioner Kilroy and other local leaders appointed the Community Task Force as part of their plans to move forward and ensure that the vital social services are continued regardless of the future of CMA CAO. The Task Force will be led by the President of AEP Ohio, Kevin Walker.

“We’ve brought together voices from across the community, from business, our churches, social service agencies and residents, to help us plot a successful course through this challenge,” said Mayor Coleman. “While CMA CAO continues to operate programs like HeadStart and HEAP, and while we are looking into possible criminal violations by former managers, we must have a plan to ensure that there’s no cut to future services and that the bills get paid in the short term.”

One critical area to improve is HeadStart, where Federal monitors ruled that CMA CAO has 90 days to fix management problems or surrender control to outside management. HeadStart serves 2,264 children in Franklin County, with an annual budget of \$16 million.

Other important community programs include HEAP, which helps seniors pay heating and cooling bills, programs to help families find employment and get out of poverty, and CMA CAO’s Teen Centers. The agency’s total annual budget is more than \$32 million.

CMA CAO Community Task Force:

John Tolbert, Columbus Health Department, **Trudy Bartley**, Deputy Director, Columbus Department of Development, **Randy Morrison**, Executive Director, Godman Guild, **Rev. Susan Smith**, Pastor, Advent United Church of Christ, **Aaron Granger**, Attorney, Schottenstien, Zox and Dunn, **Jewell Garrison**, Columbus Medical Assoc. Foundation, **Pastor Leon Troy**, Pastor, Second Baptist Church, **John Bickley**, President/ CEO, YMCA of Central Ohio, **Grady Pettigrew**, Attorney, **Mark Milligan**, President, Franklin County Affordable Housing Trust, **Kevin Walker**, President, AEP Ohio, **Rick Carrick, Sr.** VP Community Impact, United Way of Central Ohio